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## Southern Celts: Voices from *Aotearoa* New Zealand\*

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### *Abstract:*

Interview narrators reflect on living their cultural connections to Ireland and Scotland while living in *Aotearoa* New Zealand. Among the questions they focus on are whether the experience of colonisation in the northern hemisphere has influenced relations with Māori, the indigenous people of *Aotearoa*. These co-created, layered and complex narratives are viewed as “lived and told stories”, with the reader seen as a co-participant in the narrative. Applying the narrative analysis lenses of time and place left the researcher with a sense of the passage of time and the constant change that it brought for her own family and for interview narrators. These narratives are offered with a sense of celebration for the strength of cultures which can remake themselves across hemispheres and generations.

*Keywords:* Auto-ethnography, Celtic Studies, Diaspora narratives, Ethnography, Irish Studies

American novelist Colum McCann wrote “We get our voices from the voices of others [...] our stories are created from a multiplicity of witness” (2006, 277), which accurately describes my PhD journey. Through collecting the stories and engaging with the voices of others I am left with a clearer sense of my own voice, as the granddaughter of three Irish-born grandparents: my mother’s parents from County Tipperary, my father’s mother was from County Antrim, while his father was born to Irish parents in *Aotearoa*<sup>1</sup>

\* My thanks to referees who made comments on the first draft of this text. Their advice and suggestions have strengthened it and widened its scope.

<sup>1</sup> The name *Aotearoa*, according to Michael King, is believed to be derived from a myth of *Pakeha* origin about the discovery of New Zealand by Kupe, a Polynesian voyager. Nearing land the shout went up “Aotea” or “white cloud” so that land became known as *Aotearoa* “the Land of the Long White Cloud”. While King critiques the myth around this name, he acknowledged it as “an antidote to the concurrent and widespread view that Dutchman

New Zealand, his father's father, from County Londonderry. In the practice-led narrative inquiry I used interviews to explore how women and men, with Irish and Scottish backgrounds, live out their cultural connections to the northern hemisphere homelands while living in *Aotearoa* New Zealand, in the southwest Pacific.

This article offers excerpts from the interview narratives which provide insights into individual lives and families across generations. It backgrounds the inquiry, analyses the co-construction of the narratives and explores responses to two questions, one about the use of Gaelic languages and the other about whether the experience of colonisation in the northern hemisphere homelands might have influenced how Irish and Scots have related to Maori, the indigenous people of *Aotearoa* New Zealand, in the colonisation of the country. It reflects on one incident which enabled me to understand that change is a constant in how I experience my connection to Ireland, and also for interviewee narrators. To conclude it briefly reviews responses to a question about what might remain in the Kiwi psyche from earlier Irish and Scottish settlers, then it celebrates the strength of cultural identities that can remake themselves across generations.

### *1. Scottish and Irish settlement*

Historically the Scots and Irish were large European settler groups, so there are significant numbers of New Zealanders who share these cultural backgrounds. Historian Michael King writes that in the first 50 years of European settlement close to 50% of people came from England and Wales, with the Welsh fewer in number, Scots made up 24% and the Irish were up to about 19% (2003, 175). Using Presbyterianism as a proxy for Scottishness, historian James Belich notes that the provinces of Southland and Otago were about half Scottish in 1871, and this background remained in 1956. Scots were also between 17-20% of the *Pakeha*<sup>2</sup> population of the other provinces, except for Taranaki and Nelson, where the English were predominant (2001, 220). "New Zealand is the neo-Scotland" according to Belich, who argues that outside of Scotland there is probably no other country in the world in which Scots had more influence (221). However, he cautions that identifying people through ethnic difference has been difficult because the use of the word "British" collapsed significant difference amongst English, Scot-

Abel Tasman and Englishman James Cook 'discovered' New Zealand" (2003, 39-40).

<sup>2</sup> King notes that the use of the word *Pakeha* to describe people of European origin was current in the Bay of Islands, in northern New Zealand by at least 1814. He describes the word as a necessary descriptive word to distinguish European from Maori and that it probably came from the pre-European word *Pakepakeha*, denoting mythical light skinned beings (2003, 169).

tish, Irish and particularly Welsh people. Historian Angela McCarthy also addresses this issue of ethnic identity in her book *Irishness and Scottishness in New Zealand since 1840*, in which she highlights “the standard trope of New Zealand society” that emphasised its Britishness through “overarching categorisations that subsume divergent and individual and collective ethnic affiliation” (2011, 4).

Canadian diaspora scholar, Donald Harman Akenson wrote that it is difficult to estimate numbers of Irish immigrants to New Zealand with any accuracy because they left from English and Scottish ports, and may have been recorded as such, while many came through Australia (1990). Belich writes that Irish as a percentage of *Pakeha*, Protestant and Catholic, rose from around 10% in the 1850's to about 18% in the 1880's though fell thereafter. Irish Catholic immigrants were not offered immigration assistance as easily as the Scots, though the Irish immigrated through Australia in large numbers. They were not so noticeably dominant in any region, except in Westland, on the South Island West Coast, where one third of the population had an Irish background (Belich 2001, 221). King notes a number of those would have followed the gold rush from California, to Victoria, in Australia, then crossed the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. Their presence there led to public engagement with Irish political issues and the arrest of some who supported the Irish struggle for sovereignty in their homeland (2003, 208). Belich records the Irish as more dominant in smaller areas, like Temuka in South Canterbury, and urban areas, in South Dunedin and Grey Lynn in Auckland. He describes them as “clustered occupationally” in hotel keeping and policing, just on the “fringes of respectability”. The institutions of the Church and Catholic schools ensured New Zealand Catholic Irish maintained their differing sense of identity (Belich 2001, 222). Looking to the present, the New Zealand Government Online Encyclopaedia, *Te Ara*, records that over a half a million people of the current population of approximately four million, claim Irish ancestry (2015). There was no difficulty therefore finding participants, the issue was how to choose who to interview.

## *2. Theoretical and methodological framework*

Cultural theorist Christine Weedon, influenced my decisions around interview participants, through her belief that cultural identity is “neither one thing nor static [...] it is constantly produced and reproduced in the practices of everyday life, education, the media, the museum and heritage sectors, the arts, history and literature” (2004, 155). Mary Chuang's nuanced description of culture and cultural identity, referencing nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, life-style choices, organisations, age, class, group membership, regional identity and spiritual identity, also made me conscious of trying to choose

interviews from differing groups (Fong, Chuang 2004). Between 2010 and 2013, I travelled around the country interviewing 40 people, aged from 30 to 70 years old: the most recent arrival had lived there for just over a decade, while some families have been here for up to seven generations. One interviewee had no Gaelic family connections, but he designs and builds coracles, boats which have traditionally been made and used in some Celtic societies, while another member of the boat club builds traditional Irish *curragh*, all skills pertinent to this inquiry about the discursive construction of culture and identity. I represented 25 of the edited interviews, including the coracle maker, as full-length interview narratives in a book with a working title of *Southern Celts*. Three of the interviewees were Irish-born and three Scottish-born, 15 of the 25 had either discrete Irish backgrounds or a combination of cultural backgrounds, including Scottish, English, Maori and German. The 13 women and 12 men include business people, teachers and speakers of Gaelic, visual artists, writers and poets, musicians and singers, museum professionals, sports people, a Presbyterian minister and a religious studies teacher.

The inquiry used narrative as method and text (Clandinin, Connelly 2000; Clandinin, Rosiek 2007). Putting narrative in a wider academic context, narratology, which is the study of narrative as a genre, approaches narrative as a text-type and also as a mode, in which theorists view narrative as fundamental to human cognition and understanding of the world (De Fina, Georgakopoulou 2012, 2). These understandings informed a “narrative turn” in qualitative research in the 1980s which emphasised human experience and a narrative epistemology that recognises and accepts different kinds of human inquiry. Narrative methods and analysis are used across a range of disciplines including Sociology, Psychology, Education, Anthropology and History (17-18), encouraging researchers to maintain a high degree of reflexivity. Narrative scholars Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire and Maria Tamboukou (2013) acknowledge that the term “narrative” differs in meaning and uses across disciplines, and it is often used interchangeably with the word “story”, as it is in this article. An essential aspect of narrative is the linking of events chronologically or otherwise, and I argue as narrative theorist Catherine Riessman (2008, 3) does that the speaker or the writer is influenced in selection and organisation of events by the audience the narrative is aimed at. In this case each interviewee was asked the same series of questions (see Appendix).

The interviews, edited to tighten repetitive oral language, and to focus on answers to the question, were returned to interviewees for clarification and additions. Qualitative research theorist Irving Seidman cautions that text representations “frame and reify” the lives of narrators that continue in time, constantly changing over time (2006, 129). Taking that into account I view the narratives in which narrators re-story aspects of their lives as snapshots in time, valuable in themselves, given that since completing this inquiry

three interview narrators have died. The main tools of analysis are narrative theorists Patricia Clandinin's and Michael Connelly's (2000) three lenses of time (past, present and future), place, and sociality, or the intersection of the personal and the social. When applied they highlight the layered depth and complexity of the narratives.

The exegesis which critiques the process of creating the book of interviews and analyses related academic issues is underpinned by postmodern and poststructuralist understandings, including sociologist Laurel Richardson's metaphor of the crystal through which each interview narrative is viewed conceptually as a refraction of a crystal, "what we see depends on our angle of repose" (2000, 934). It acknowledges that narrators' Irish or Scottish backgrounds are only one aspect of more complex identities, supported by narrative theorist Elliot Mishler who writes that individuals have multiple identities, each rooted in different sets of relationships "that form the matrix of our lives" (2006, 41).

Questions about memory and truth were apparent from the beginning of the inquiry. Working with personal memory and family stories, truth is often viewed as relational rather than historically accurate, as narrative theorist Arthur Bochner has observed (2012). My own experience of interviewing both my parents about their experiences as children of Irish migrants supports that. In my mother's case, I showed the text to her sister, my aunt, whose opinion about experiences differed markedly in some cases, including dates of occurrences. However, family stories are important, I argue, because they help shape our sense of identity.

My own family story is included as an autoethnographic essay alongside the other interview narratives. In doing that I have broken down the subject/object split of more traditional research frames according to Deborah Reed-Danahay, in her analysis of autoethnographic methods (1997). Australian scholar, Josie Arnold, calls this use of the researcher's personal experience, as data, "academic narrative" (2011). Using autoethnography in qualitative research has been criticised as self-indulgent, but I argue, as Tessa Muncey (2010) and Heewon Chang (2008) have done, that if written reflectively and critically, drawing connections to the wider world, this self-disclosure allows the reader insights into influences which have shaped the researcher/writer, and how these have influenced the inquiry. Johanna Spry believes that the use of autoethnographic methods makes the researcher the epistemological and ontological nexus of the research process (2001, 711) and over time the inquiry unexpectedly also became an exploration of my personal and professional identities.

Through using ethnographic and autoethnographic methods (Ellis, Bochner 2000; Holman Jones, Adams, Ellis 2013) and reflecting on underpinning literatures, I am left with a clear insight and a new understanding.

As a former journalist and an academic writer my ideas may have been expressed, but my voice had felt buried or “homogenised” as Richardson described (2000; Richardson, St. Pierre 2005). Through the inquiry process, however, I have come to understand that professional distance has collapsed, that I have been writing “myself and the social world” (Reed-Danahay 1997, 17), through collecting stories of others I have been collecting myself (Clair 2003, 3) and as a consequence of reflection, analysis and using writing as a way into understanding (Richardson 2000), I feel I can hear my own voice at last.

The inquiry is entitled “Southern Celts”: Southern, for New Zealand’s position in the South West Pacific, and Celts for the northern hemisphere tribes who spread up into and across Europe to the Atlantic coast over millennia, their journeys analysed by DNA specialist Stephen Oppenheimer (2006) and archaeologist James Patrick Mallory (2018). I met with resistance to the use of the term Celt from one New Zealand academic who cautioned against using it, because some historians are sceptical about the actual historical reality of Celtic tribes. As an applied linguist, drawing on Diarmuid O’Neill’s research about Celtic languages (2005), I knew that one of the branches of Celtic languages, was the Gaelic languages, of Irish, Scots Gaelic and Manx, therefore I proceeded with the title “Southern Celts”. I am aware that Irish and Scots will likely view their identities in terms of their nationality, however, as a researcher and a writer, it is my choice to view myself as a Southern Celt: there was no objection from any interview narrator and one master carver of Irish and Scottish background felt the name accurately represented him:

I basically see myself as a Southern Celt, a South Pacific Celt. The way I look at it, as the Celts came across Europe they could have pick up influences of different cultures. In a sense if I didn’t reflect a certain Polynesian influence in my work it would mean I was insensitive. Maori people will come in and see my work and say it’s very Maori, and people who come straight from England look at it and say it’s pure Celtic. I like to see it as a mixture of both.

### *3. Narratives as co-produced*

Narrative theorist Catherine Riessman writes that a story is co-produced in a “complex geography”, “in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, history and culture” (2008, 105), illustrated in the first excerpt from the interview narrative of a sculptor who lives on Waiheke Island, a ferry trip from Auckland city, whose father, from an active republican family in South West Kerry, arrived in New Zealand in 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II:

My father was almost thirty when he came to New Zealand [...] I always say he never really landed here. As a child, for years I did not understand where he was

talking from. It didn't seem to be the world around us at that point in time [...] As an artist I started making art works about where he might possibly be talking from and that might be about some internal landscape.

That was before I'd been to Ireland myself [...] In 1985 I spent a lot of time in Central Otago and something was absolutely a dam overflowing, because I recognised the landscape in Central Otago as the internal landscape that he was speaking from. My father came from a part of Ireland that was quite barren, and this land clearly represented it in my mind. So this unleashed a body of work over three decades: just that realisation, that I finally understood my father was actually talking from his native landscape, not the New Zealand landscape.

In a moment of epiphany in a dry, rocky area of the South Island of New Zealand he understood for the first time that his father had lived out of the landscape that had formed him in Ireland both physically and emotionally, an understanding that has played out powerfully in his son's life in his work as a sculptor, in which he has used a variety of materials, including stone, limestone and slate. The sculptor's narrative tells a story of three generations: his father, himself and his daughter, who he says "completed a circularity of life. She is a unique example of how the 'New World' informs the 'Old World' in ways people could never have dreamed". Completing an Archaeology masters at Auckland University, she worked on her MA supervisor's site in Hawaii, learned satellite mapping skills, and later worked at the British Museum for a short time. She did a doctorate in Ireland becoming a part of academic life in Dublin, for fifteen years. Though she lived in Ireland, the influence of the place she grew up was evident, as her father describes:

She researched sites up the north of Scotland and in Ireland [...] She was very conscious of the places she took me to look at in Ireland, that these had resonances with her childhood here on Waiheke Island. We are talking about one of those very imaginative intelligences, where the child can teach the adult, the parent. That was going on with three or four of my trips with her in Ireland. She would take me to a place, but she wouldn't explain it. She would know I would very quickly understand the imprint of some aspect of her life here on the top of that site. That's what I marvelled at. I suppose she absorbed my sensibility as she was growing up in my studio here. Crawling around, she was fascinated with dust which I've created quite a lot of. She became one of the world authorities on dust as an archaeological material. So there was just a brilliant conversation going on with her research and her learning about where it might have located itself in her childhood. She said her childhood inspired some of her breakthroughs in thinking and research over there.

His daughter tragically died of a virulent cancer and her father gifted a sculpture to the Dublin university and a native New Zealand tree was planted there in her memory. The sculptor's narrative is illuminated through applying the analysis frame of "place". Place is experienced as physical landscapes, in Ireland, Scotland and *Aotearoa* New Zealand, and significantly as internal

landscapes, illustrating Ivan Brady's understanding that "Place is the geography of earth, mind, body and lived experience of the seen and unseen [...]" (2005, 985). This excerpt, as Riessman (2008) describes, is clearly co-produced in a complex geography of history and culture, crossing generations and the hemispheres, telling a story deeply informed by Irish family and cultural connections, one in which place encompasses powerful emotional landscapes: geography is indeed experienced as land, mind and body as Brady believes.

#### *4. Language as constitutive of identity*

The metaphorical crystal refracts in the following three excerpts from narrators' responses to a question whether they could speak Irish or Scots Gaelic. The choice of this question was prompted by my professional role as an applied linguist who has explored influences of social identity on language acquisition (Kearney, 2003) also because my mother's parents were Irish speakers. My mother and my aunt remembered their parents using Irish at home, though none was passed on to us. An older sister and I have since both learned some basic Irish. *Aotearoa* New Zealand scholar Stephen May provided me a broader context for understanding the functions of language, through his exploration of the postmodern concept of "hybridity", in which "social, political and linguistic identities are inevitably plural, complex and contingent" (2005, 329). In this context language can be viewed as a *contingent* factor of identity, though none the less significant or *constitutive* of identity (330).

Interview responses to the question about experience of or attitude to Irish or Scots Gaelic varied widely. Interviewees generally acknowledged the importance of language to a culture, but several had no personal interest in the language. Of the 25 narrators, two were Irish-born and had learned Irish at school and two New Zealand-born participants had applied themselves to learning Irish in New Zealand. The first of the three excerpts came from a Dublin-born Irish speaker who lives in Nelson at the top of the South Island. She reflects on the difficulties of keeping Irish a living language in *Aotearoa*:

A few of us tried for a while to keep the language going. We used to meet on a regular basis with some other people to speak Irish and to up-skill ourselves in the language. In that group initially were two New Zealanders of Irish extraction who wanted to learn the language, but it was pretty daunting. One of those guys had never ever learned another language so I'm afraid he just didn't have the skills to do it, but the other chap had learnt Spanish and Maori and he was very good. But then I got full-time work and we sort of stopped meeting on a regular basis ... It's really hard to keep that a living thing. Life is very full with other things, so it is not a priority.

My connection with the Irish language now is through learning songs in Irish. Some I particularly like are "Mo Ghile Mear", "Anach Cuain", "Fill a Run",



“Gabhaim Molta Bride Teir Abhaile Riu”, “Molly nag Cuach Ni Chuilleanain”, “Bruachna Carraige Baine”, “Siul a Run”, “Ta mochleamhnas a Dheanamh”, “An Mhaighdean Mhara”.

The narrator sang in an all-women band, *Cairdre*, for some decades, though it has now disbanded. She taught other women in the group to sing songs of Irish history, in Irish. One of their CDs of New Zealand Irish music was gifted to the then Prime Minister, James Bolger, who himself has an Irish family background. She and her husband, a professional musician, have been involved as founder members in *Ceol Aneas*, an Irish Music festival, which draws participants from around New Zealand and overseas, including Ireland.

The second excerpt comes from an archivist and curator at the museum of early settlement in Dunedin, a southern city which still values its Scottish heritage. A teacher on the Irish and Scottish Studies Programme at Otago University, he has written his family history of a multi-generational chain of families from County Kerry between 1860 and 1873. This vibrant community of Irish migrants, called Kerrytown, in South Canterbury, has passed into history, with only a plaque in a paddock now recording its existence. He reflects on learning both Irish and Maori:

In terms of the language, it annoyed me when I looked at Irish words I couldn't make any sense of the letters and the sounds. I just felt pathetic that this is my ancestral language and I can't even read what the sound is. I'm good with languages, I learnt French and German at school and university. I've learned Maori and am capable to a basic degree in Maori, so I was determined to make some progress at learning Irish and have had a few cracks at it. I eventually bought a very good self-help course on Amazon and have read the first ten chapters. It is still sitting there waiting for me to carry on, but I got to the point I could look at an Irish word and most of the time I could understand what the sounds were, without having to think about it.

[...] I am also doing that for the music. I'm in a *waiata* group (singing group) here in the city council and we learn Maori songs and sing them in public. I decided every time I learned a new Maori song I'd try to learn a new Irish song. The Maori songs are easier to learn but the Irish songs are hard – I've persevered so have now got quite a big repertoire of Irish songs and I've taught my children some of them. When they were little they were open to that, now they wouldn't bother so much, but when I die they'll probably sing an Irish song over my body. They know I'd like that.

He had his singing group learn an Irish folk song, “Ora Se do Bheatha Abhaile”, which they sang at an Irish exhibition opening, attended by the Irish ambassador from Australia and the New Zealand Irish Consul General, interposing it with a Maori song called “Ko Tou Rourou” based around the importance of sharing resources. They sang a verse of that and then the first line of the chorus of “Ora Se do Bheatha Abhaile”, proceeded with the second verse, and carried on finishing with the final chorus. For him the cul-

tural capital of facility with Irish is realised in song, in both personal, family and professional environments. Applying the frame of time across generations in to the future, he has taught his children Irish songs, and hopes now they might sing one for him when he has died.

The third excerpt is from an *Uilleann* pipe player, with “a mixed Irish, Scottish, Northumbrian” background, who belonged to the Auckland Irish Society for a number of years and was also a member of the New Zealand *Uilleann* Pipers Association, *Na Piobairi Uilleann*, in Dublin, and subscribed for many years to *Irish Music* magazine:

I started to learn Irish Gaelic at Continuing Education at Auckland University in [...] Once this course had finished, the class carried on at the Auckland Irish Society clubrooms [...] Our teacher was from Belfast and very experienced. I am not by nature a sociable type, but I made many friends in this class – we shared musical and literary, as well as linguistic, interests. I believe that having an understanding, even if not as a fluent speaker, of any language is central to understanding the culture – the rhythms and thought patterns – and for the music in particular. Slow airs played on the *Uilleann* pipes usually derive from songs in Gaelic, so to get the phrasing it is helpful to know and understand the words. The sound of the spoken language carries through into the form and phrasing of the music.

From a classical music background originally, she is now a “lapsed” *Uilleann* pipe player, though she still has a picture on her Facebook page of her playing for the sesquicentennial of Auckland coming into the harbour in a *curragh* accompanied by a Maori *waka* (a traditional canoe). Each of the three narrative excerpts has a common theme in the connection between language, music and song. Other participants spoke or had learned Irish and Scots Gaelic, either formally at night classes in an institution or in a private home. I have explored attitudes to and use of Gaelic in an earlier published article from this PhD inquiry, written with Martin Andrew, my lead PhD supervisor (Kearney, Andrew 2013).

### 5. *The experience of colonisation*

One question I asked participants was whether they thought the history of colonisation in the northern homelands might have affected how people have related to indigenous Maori in the colonisation of *Aotearoa*. This question was prompted by my understanding of Irish history gained early from my grandmother, mother, and an aunt, a Dominican religious sister, who taught me Irish history in secondary school. I have since read more widely about Irish history, most instructively written with a feminist analysis (Ward 1983). I also spent nearly a year in Ireland, in the mid 1980s, where I saw the militarisation of the North and understood the violence of colonisation, for the first time. I knew that Irish people in New Zealand have benefited

from access to Maori land and resources, as have my own families. The silencing of indigenous languages is likewise a powerful tool in colonisation, a process I have some understanding of through gaining insight into Maori experience. In an analysis of language rights May points out that laws used to suppress Maori in *Aotearoa* were earlier used to suppress Gaelic in Ireland and Scotland. He analyses similarities between the struggle for survival of Gaelic languages and Maori in the context of broader social and political environments and influences, including that of colonisation by force (2001). Several participants in the inquiry had attempted to learn *Te Reo* (the Maori language), one woman of Irish background, who chose to learn *Te Reo* rather than Irish, said by way of explanation, "If I don't speak Maori here, who will?"

The first of the following four narrators is a Belfast-born religious studies teacher who settled with her family in New Zealand in the early 1970s. She compares Irish and Maori struggle for land and cultural similarities:

When you see the Maori wanting to go for their land, you think, "It is their land, but it was our land in Ireland too and we never got anything". The Scottish as well. It's hard because we didn't get it. It's easier here for Maori, because as soon as they say something everybody says, "Yes, it is the Maori's land". I suppose we are older countries in Ireland and Scotland. If we were to do that now you wouldn't get anywhere. You can sympathise with the Maori though, it's very hard, when I think about it. The shoe is on the other foot, because we're here, and we don't want to take anything away from them. But we give a lot too, to the country. I suppose if I was in Ireland I'd want the same thing. I just realised that. I think there's a lot of Maori and Gaelic similarities. You look at some of those carved patterns, they are very similar. When people die, it's not just, "that's the funeral and it's all over", there's a lot of holiness and *tapu* (sacredness) there. It's all about family really, and there's something spiritual there. I think there's a very close connection.

The narrator suggests by her comment "I just realised that" that she has gained a new perspective on the situation since being in *Aotearoa* New Zealand. She comments on her perceptions of similarities between the cultures. The second excerpt comes from a Dublin-born fiction writer, who emigrated with her family five decades ago:

I'd like to be able to say that the colonised in one country were sympathetic to those colonised in another, but I have to say looking at history, I think people learn from their own experience, the bullied become bullies [...] So sadly I don't think there would be any truth in thinking that they would have that sympathy [...] I don't think historically there is any evidence of widespread sympathy of the Irish towards any other colonised people. And as we both know the Irish and the Scots made up a huge percentage of the British imperial army. But then that was because they were colonised and it was one of the few things they could do to escape the poverty. Just as many Maori join the New Zealand army.

At the same time I would say the Irish and the Maori probably do have certain things in common that on a personal level might make or have made empathy between them. I think the oral tribal society is one area and the ability to sing and entertain and orate to make entertainment is something that Irish and Maori probably share [...].

She too finds similarities between Irish and Scots and Maori in the process of colonisation, though she is clear that having experienced it did not necessarily stop Irish people from benefiting from the process in *Aotearoa* as they did in other parts of the world.

The next excerpt is from a man who has devoted several decades, along with his wife, to educating New Zealanders about the Treaty of Waitangi<sup>3</sup>. He and his daughter have written about their work in the book, *Healing Our History* (Consedine, Consedine 2001). He doesn't consider his Irish background consciously directed him into the work, though he highlights the combined influences of his knowledge of Irish history and Catholic social teaching as important:

I don't think the experience of colonisation has necessarily affected how Irish and Scots have related to Maori. Global literature tells us that the Irish tended to join the dominant class for a variety of reasons [...] Irish who went to America tended to support the slave owners. They often benefitted from colonisation wherever they went. I've never encountered anything in New Zealand that would change that broad idea. There are of course individual exceptions, but the broad idea is that people who have been oppressed tend to end up joining the oppressor. I don't think it's confined to the Irish. Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian educator wrote that "the oppressed became the oppressors". I think, right through the empire, escaping from oppression meant joining the oppressors.

In his workshops he highlights the importance of *Pakeha*, people knowing their own history:

I often say to people in workshops in the dialogue around personal journeys "If you knew your own story you'd become a natural ally of the Maori struggle". A large number of people don't know their own story. For example, I say to people, "Why did your ancestors leave Ireland?" They wouldn't have heard of the penal laws and some may have not heard of the famine. They wouldn't know anything about the colonisation of

<sup>3</sup> In his book *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, Dr Ranginui Walker describes the history of the Treaty of Waitangi, signed on February 6, 1840, by representatives of Queen Victoria and Maori chiefs, though not all, as facilitating the cession of sovereignty from Maori to the Queen of England (1990, 91). He records, from a Maori perspective, the elevation of the treaty from a "simple nullity" to a constitutional instrument in the renegotiation of the relationship between Maori and Pakeha in modern times (266).

Ireland. One of the connections we make is to talk about the way colonisation dispossessed their own ancestors in much the same way as Maori were dispossessed. People get a glimpse of the connection. It's rare to encounter people who have already figured that out.

He recalled that James Bolger, former New Zealand Prime Minister between 1990 and 1997, supported the work of the Waitangi Tribunal which is a mechanism for government to offer recompense to Maori for loss of land and resources, because he knew his own Irish history. Narrators repeatedly acknowledged that at a macro social level Irish and Scots escaping dispossession in their own lands dispossessed Maori in *Aotearoa*, as they did indigenous peoples in Australia and the United States.

The following excerpt offers another narrative, a less well known and often subjugated voice, from a publisher and writer with Irish, German and Maori, *Te Arawa iwi* (tribe) cultural heritages, who tells a story in the song he wrote in the 1990s. It is a narrative based on a story of a soldier in the 65<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, who fought in the New Zealand Land Wars<sup>4</sup>. Historically large numbers of Irish fought in the regiment and the writer has ascribed an Irish identity to the soldier, though another narrator and other sources identify the soldier as English:

To escape from the famine, starvation and pain

And seeing his dear ones dying

Patrick Fitzgerald left old Erin's Isle

And headed for the South Seas sailing

He landed here without a pig or a bob

And decided to join the army

Because it was the only job

To take the land from the Maori

*Chorus*

*He thinks to himself by the fire at night*

<sup>4</sup> Belich dates The New Zealand Wars as 1845-1872 (2001). These military actions dispossessed Maori of their land as a response to the growing demand for land from increasing numbers of *Pakeha* settlers.

*I don't know why we kill them  
O, sure they're the same as the people at home  
Potatoes, fish and children*

His orders were clear to set up a fight  
So the crown could claim confiscation  
Of land to which they had no legal right  
Then one winter when the cloud hung low  
When the moon was hidden by mist and by damp  
He picked up his gun and some food in a sack  
And crept silently out of the soldiers' camp  
He travelled by night and he rested by day  
To escape from the pay of the crown...

*Chorus*

The beauty he saw in this wonderful land  
Reminded him of his far away home  
He fell asleep for a very long time  
And he dreamed that he was no longer alone  
The tribe that found him took his body back  
From *te wahi moemoea* (the sleeping place) and restored him to life  
For they saw in his eyes when they opened  
Potatoes fish and children ("Potatoes, Fish and Children")<sup>5</sup>

While on a macro level Maori were disenfranchised personal narratives such as the one this song is based on show that some individuals recognised an essential humanity across ethnic and cultural differences. Another inter-

<sup>5</sup> I interviewed Michael O'Leary on 16/07/2011. He gave me a copy of the words of his song, "Potatoes, Fish and Children" explaining he had written it for the Dunedin Irish band, Blackthorn, in the early 1990s.

view narrator with Irish, English, Scottish and Maori, *Te Rarawa iwi*, backgrounds told of how his great, great, grandfather, an Irish trader, who spoke fluent Maori, married a local chief's daughter. His story details a cross generational struggle to regain control of family land and to have enough resources to develop and use the land, ironically echoing Irish experience of colonisation. New Zealand scholar, Angela Wanhalla, her father of Irish, German and Maori ancestry and her mother of Irish and Manx, writes about marriages across races in her book *Matters of the Heart* (2013), often providing touching understandings of individual lives and relationships across 200 years.

### 6. *A linguistic insight*

One moment of insight crystallised the heart of the inquiry for me. At a dance performance about place, choreographed and danced by Karen Barbour (2014) the background video was of a Maori woman who led her people to reclaim tribal land from government control. She spoke about the importance of land, reminding listeners that the Maori word for "land" (*whenua*) also means "placenta" or "afterbirth". On reflection, this linguistic insight allowed me to bring together the three frames of narrative analysis, time, place and sociality, and contributed to a more layered sense of my own cultural identity, underpinned for me by a sense of spirituality which collapses time and place.

There is a Maori tradition of burying the placenta and the umbilical cord where there is family or significant connection, the land then is a link between past generations and those to come, providing both a physical and spiritual link to that place and through this a strong sense of identity over time (*Te Ara Online Encyclopaedia* 2018). While I was born in the south of the South Island, our farm bordering the Pacific Ocean, my genetic and cultural inheritance from my parents is Irish and New Zealand Irish. I love that southern land and ocean, and feel grateful to have been born there, but my deepest sense of myself comes from my parents and their families in Ireland and as time passes, much of this resides in memory.

New Zealand novelist Gillian Ranshead, in a novel about the consequences of intergenerational violence caused by colonisation in Scotland and *Aotearoa*, writes that "Memory, 'Memory is a quicksilver thread woven in and out of our lives through the centuries, illusive and ineffable [...] it searches for us, wanting to be found, it chimes like a bell within us, ringing true'" (2008, 393). That chime of memory has rung true for me in the years of this inquiry as I have negotiated external and internal landscapes, accompanied by the quiet presences and strength of family beyond the veil of this physical world, or so it seems to me. It is hard for me to remember a time when I was not aware of Ireland as a place and the place where my people came from. My

parents never travelled to Ireland and it would have been possible for them to go in their older age. They seemed to have no need to go.

### 7. *Generations pass*

Irish American scholar, Oona Frawley writes that “Cultural memory in the diaspora is often a search for consciousness, the quest to fill in what are felt as blanks and losses in the landscape of cultural memory” (2012, 10). I would not describe my experience as a search for consciousness, rather a process of remaking relationships. My three sisters and I have travelled to Ireland, sometimes taking children, so the family is knit together again across the world. Members of our Irish family have visited us, once again connecting our southern family with our northern hemisphere cousins. Electronic communications and easier access to air travel mean that distance is not the barrier it was for my grandparents. During this inquiry, my mother and her sister died leaving my siblings and me with one of my mother’s brothers to connect us directly to our Irish-born grandparents: our father’s generation now rests in death, though we were not able to re-establish links in Ireland with his father’s or mother’s people in the northern counties. As our older generations die we are actively constructing and reconstructing relationships within our families, in the southern and the northern hemispheres that hold our cultural memories. Our mother’s mother lived with us for some years, and she died with us, and the sound of a soft Irish voice still brings her back across time to me. For my generation then the link to Ireland is living, but the children and grandchildren of this generation, with less emotional connection, will make what they will of their New Zealand Irishness.

### 8. *The role of the reader*

As highlighted earlier in the article, the reader in this narrative inquiry is viewed as a co-participant in the narrative. I chose full-length interviews for the book so that readers might have an opportunity to read each individual narrative and reflect, to bring their own experience to the narrators’ stories. I aimed to keep the speaker’s individual tone and choice words and phrases, to give the reader a sense of the individual narrator’s voice, not wanting my voice as the researcher and the writer to overlay the voice of the narrator. My aim in representing full-length interview narratives is to encourage readers to read *with*, rather than *about* narratives as Arthur Bochner and Nicholas Riggs suggest (2014). Like Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner I believe that “Evocative stories [...] long to be used rather analysed; to be told and retold rather than theorised and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts” (2000, 744).



Susan Chase (2005, 669) quotes Ken Plummer to suggest that “For narratives to flourish, there must be a community to hear [...] for communities to hear, there must be stories to weave together history [...] The one – community – feeds upon the other – story”. There are large communities of Irish and Scots in New Zealand, who I hope will have access to these narratives. I have shared them with one community which has met yearly for thirty years, in the north of the North Island in a community historically associated with Scots who came to New Zealand via Nova Scotia. Called “The Gaeltacht”, it is a week-long gathering (<[www.nzgaidhealtachd.org](http://www.nzgaidhealtachd.org)>), drawing people from Celtic backgrounds Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Breton, and Galician to share histories, music, dance and other cultural traditions.

### 9. Conclusion

What is there in “the Kiwi psyche” which might relate to our Irish and Scots ancestors? An inappropriately stereotypical idea perhaps that an entire nation would have one psyche, particularly in an inquiry which is underpinned by the concept of identity being multiple and changing: interview narrators found no difficulty responding to the question. Several connected their Irish and Highland Scots backgrounds with New Zealand traditions of hospitality and having an open home for visitors. Others spoke about a sense of egalitarianism: one recalls the saying that in New Zealand people may look down, but no-one looks up, adding a saying from Scotland “We’re all Jock Thompson’s *bairns* [children]”. Another suggests that a Scot, Peter Fraser, former education minister, then Prime Minister (1940-1949) helped embed a sense of egalitarianism into our education system, though the narrator admits that with economic globalisation this attitude is changing and wonders how New Zealanders will tolerate “astronomical” differences in salaries. The influence of a Scottish respect for education, particularly of women, was referenced, as was a certain lack of emotion or “dourness” in Kiwis that was ascribed to the Central and Lowland Scots. Ease of participation in rituals and traditions around the experience of death and dying, for people with an Irish Catholic background, was also mentioned.

Reflecting on what this “Southern Celts” inquiry might offer to others of the Irish diaspora, I hesitate to make generalisations. The broad definitions of culture and cultural identity that underpin the inquiry are prefaced with the understanding that these are not static, nor necessarily singular. My questions were deliberately kept general so that people might speak of their life experience in their own ways. I chose interviewees whose lives illustrated certain aspects of culture, therefore I have to an extent predetermined the content of the narratives. These narratives do however tell of individuals and communities whose lives have contributed to and influenced the development of *Aotearoa* New Zealand.

My intention was to create a narrative, a multi-voiced narrative, and my wish is for people to read these stories, bringing their own life experience to the engagement and then as co-participants in the narrative to generate new insights, as Ellis and Bochner suggest (2000, 744). The narratives do not finish in this text, they are ongoing “lived and told” stories. I offer them in a sense of celebration for the family and communities who have nurtured me, and for the interview narrators and their families, also for the strength of Irish and Scottish cultures which can remake themselves anew, far from the northern hemisphere homelands. In this exploration of the discursive construction of culture and identity, the lens of place has provided me with powerful insights, expressed with depth and subtlety in Ivan Brady’s understanding that “Place is the geography of earth, mind, body and lived experience of the seen and unseen [...]” (2005, 985).

## Appendix

1. What is your/your family’s Celtic/Gaelic (Ireland, Scotland) cultural background?
2. Were you born in New Zealand? If not, where were you born? When and why did you move to New Zealand? How old were you? Could you tell me more about your experience?
3. Tell me more about your connection to New Zealand. How has it been expressed in your life (for instance, experiences of your grandparents or parents; food, clothes, music, stories, religion?) Are there particular stories, people, or objects that you associate with, or that embody your experience?
4. Have you visited/revisited the homeland of this cultural connection? Has this made a difference to your feelings, attitudes, and personal understanding?
5. Do you speak any of the language[s] of the country? Do you think that this is important?
6. Do your choices in terms of business, art, music, employment, hobbies (or any other aspect of your life) reflect your cultural connection to New Zealand?
7. Has this cultural connection shown itself at particular times of your life? Have you been conscious of it as you have had important life experiences, such as celebrating achievements, having a child, burying a family member or a friend? Have you taken any particular action because of this?

8. Has your attitude to and understanding of this cultural connection changed over time? Has this been influenced by particular factors?

9. Is there anything in the Kiwi psyche which you can link to Celtic/Gaelic cultural roots? Can you identify any characteristics or behaviours in New Zealand society or in New Zealanders that might reflect the Celtic/Gaelic connection?

10. The Irish and the Scots have been systematically colonised and they have suffered for this. Do you think that their experience has influenced the way they have related to Maori, in the process of colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand?

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